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NEWSWEEK
December 21, 1959

CIGARETTES:

Do They—Or Don't They?

To smoke or not to smoke? The question still awaits a final, undebatable medical answer, but those who dispute the theory that cigarettes are a factor in causing lung cancer got sturdy support last week from an unexpected and highly authoritative source—The Journal of the American Medical Association.

It was unexpected because in its Nov. 28 issue, which reached some 185,000 doctor-members of the AMA, The Journal ran a special, nine-page report by Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney, warning that "the weight of evidence" pointed to cigarette smoking as the "principal cause" of the increased incidence of lung cancer (NEWSWEEK, Dec. 7). Three weeks later, in an editorial in the Dec. 12 issue of The Journal, its new editor, Dr. John H. Talbott, sharply questioned the accuracy of Dr. Burney's conclusions: "Although the studies [cited by Burney] reveal a relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer that seems more than coincidental, they do not explain why, even when smoking patterns are the same, case rates are higher among men than women, and among urban than rural populations. Neither the proponents nor the opponents of the smoking theory have sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption of an all-or-none authoritative position. Until definitive studies are forthcoming, the physician can fulfill his responsibility by watching the situation closely, keeping courant of the facts, and advising his patients on the basis of his appraisal of those facts. The Public Health Service can best meet its obligations by collecting and disseminating data from all sources, and making known to the health and medical professions its own evaluations of such data."

New Blood: Why did the AMA Journal switch its stand? "It didn't," said Dr. Talbott, who took over this important editorial post only three weeks ago, with the issue which carried the Burney statement. "As in any magazine, you have to differentiate between scientific opinions published in articles, and editorial opinions, which should be strictly personal." Talbott, a young-looking 57, is an Iowa-born, Harvard-trained internal-medicine specialist, who for the past twelve years had edited the highly respected scientific quarterly, Medicine. He was a member of the editorial board that evaluated and accepted the Burney article. "The Burney piece seemed based on statistics in a New York State Department of Health publication on the same subject," he said. "The Surgeon General simply re-presented the same data."

In New Delhi on a round-the-world trip, Surgeon General Burney could not be reached for a comment on the repudiation of his AMA Journal article by Dr. Talbott. But in Washington, D.C., Dr. John Porterfield, acting Surgeon General, told NEWSWEEK: "The USPHS, in publishing its Nov. 28 article in the AMA Journal, followed its established policy of making fully available to the medical and health professions and general public all the facts on smoking and lung cancer as rapidly as they develop. We continue to stand by our earlier statement, namely that the weight of evidence at present implicates smoking as the principal causative factor in the increase of lung cancer in the U.S. and other parts of the world."

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THE BOSTON HERALD
Boston, Massachusetts
December 11, 1959

AMA Editorial Disputes Burney On Cigarettes

CHICAGO (AP)—The Journal of the American Medical Assn. said Tuesday that there is insufficient evidence "to warrant the assumption" that cigarette smoking is the principal factor in the increase in lung cancer.

In an editorial, the Journal questions conclusions in a report by Dr. Leroy E. Burney, surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service.

The report lists smoking as the main factor leading to such an increase and concludes that heavy smokers are more prone to lung cancer than others.

Burney's report, summarizing research on lung cancer, was carried two weeks ago in the Journal.

DURHAM MORNING HERALD
Durham, North Carolina
December 12, 1959

Sound Stand On Cigarette-Cancer Relation

Two weeks after publishing Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney's article to the effect that cigarette smoking is the principal cause of the increase in lung cancer, the *Journal* of the American Medical Association has editorially questioned that thesis.

In its editorial the A.M.A. *Journal* takes a position which should be obvious, that the definitive work on the relation of cigarette smoking and lung cancer has not yet been done and there has not yet been obtained "sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption of an all-or-none authoritative position."

The comment of the *Journal* summarizes the present status of the matter:

"A number of authorities who have examined the same evidence cited by Dr. Burney do not agree with his conclusions. Although the studies reveal a relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer that seems more than coincidental, they do not explain why, even when smoking patterns are the same, case rates are higher among men than among women and among urban than among rural populations.

"Until definitive studies are forthcoming, the physician can fulfill his responsibilities by watching the situation closely, keeping informed of the facts, and advising his patients on the basis of his appraisal of those facts. The Public Health Service (which Surgeon General Burney heads) can best meet its obligations by collecting and disseminating data for all sources and making known to the health and medical professions its own evaluations of such data."

As this newspaper pointed out in commenting on the Burney article, not enough yet is known of the causes of cancer to fix the blame on any particular factor. Researchers have several leads, which need to be pursued before cigarette smoking, any more than industrial smog and fumes from motor vehicles, should be described as responsible for the increase in lung cancer. And in the last few days, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare Arthur Flemming has called attention to the fact that a synthetic hormone used to treat chickens and other animals whose meat is used for food has produced cancer experimentally.

In the light of present knowledge, there are too many possibilities for any one factor to be held responsible for the increase in lung cancer.

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